



COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Face facts, Mr. Quinn

Barry Quinn, a Halton regional councillor who is also a member of the local police board, says different area communities could decide what level of law enforcement they want by choosing how much they will pay for it.

That sounds logical enough on first blush. The more constituents decide to pay, the better the enforcement they get. If Milton pays proportionately more than Oakville, Milton gets that much better police service.

Mr. Quinn succeeded in getting the support staff involved with the police board to look into the idea. We can only hope their investigations suggest this tangent is impractical, since it is certainly unpalatable.

There is a substantial difference even between imposing, for example, new universal user fees and implementing a scheme like this. If the provincial government invokes universal user fees for health care, to make a case in point, such fees may not be popular but they can be sold. The key is getting the public to accept that everyone has an oar in the water. Everyone will pay.

On the other hand, offering what could quickly become an insufficient police presence to one community while its neighbour gets Cadillac service renders politicians extremely vulnerable. Some taxpayers, those paying for the budget police service, will complain of being shortchanged, perhaps justifiably.

Others, the Cadillac set, will also complain since they will perceive themselves as paying an unwarranted premium the first time something goes missing, or if they get a speeding ticket when the cops should have been chasing real criminals.

Each group of constituents will mistrust the other, and blame that situation, accurately, on the politicians who fostered it.

While crying poverty in support of this flawed adventure, Mr. Quinn retreated into well-worn political legerdemain. He asked that the cost of police services be separated out on property tax bills, to show its insignificance relative to the total tax load.

This tactic has been used by many politicians before Mr. Quinn — at the Town of Milton, at Halton Region, at the Halton Region Conservation Authority — in fact probably everywhere except the boards of education, since they get the lion's share of property taxes.

It has also been employed to sell everything from cars to dishwashers in the private sector. There it is of course a way to soften the blow of a substantial cost.

In the public domain, it is a lame rationale employed by those who can offer no remedy for wanton spending. Instead they point out worse excesses among others.

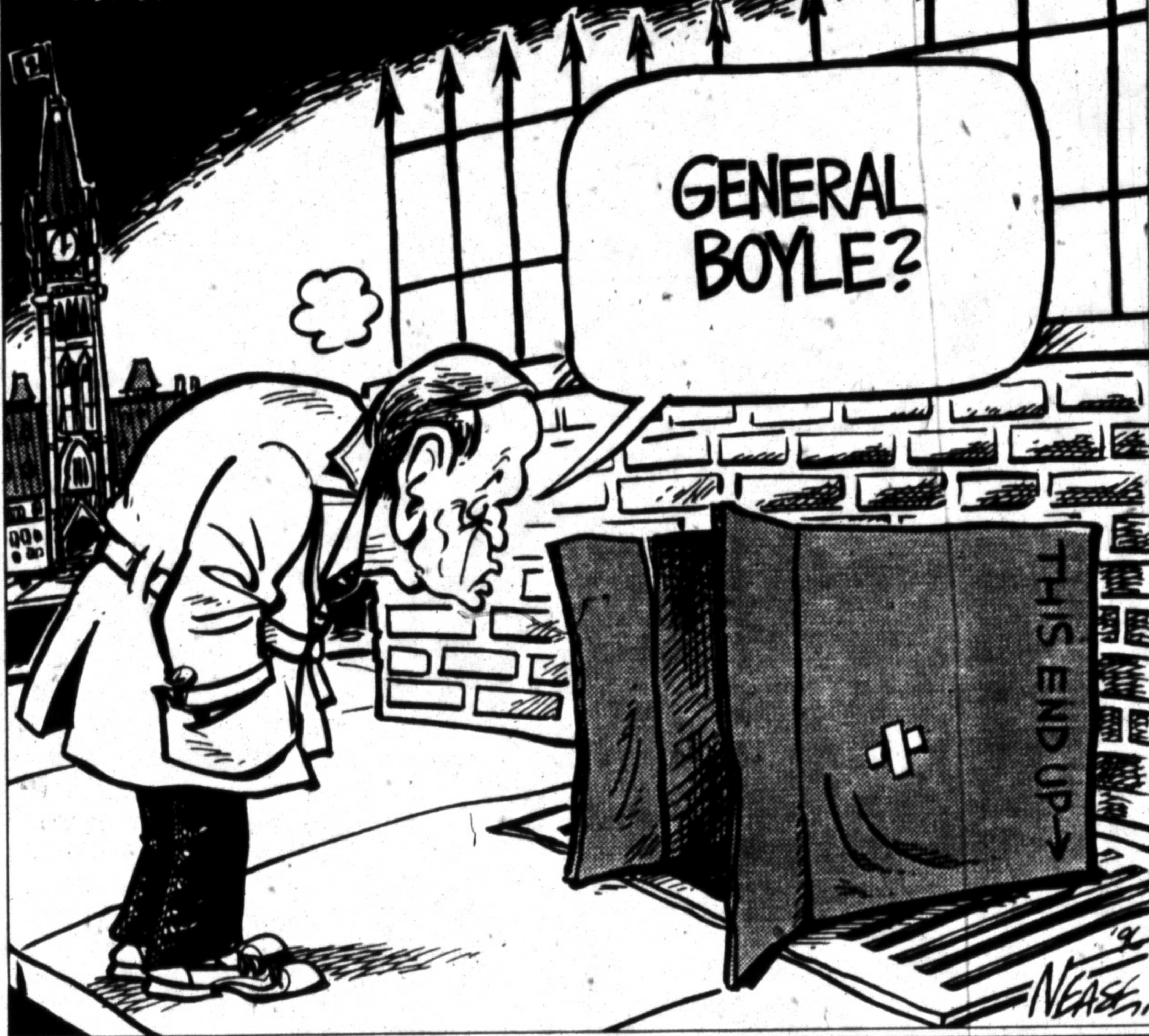
Mr. Quinn also compares the expense of policing to the cost of regional water services, saying the latter has gone up substantially while the former has not, although the public demands high standards in both areas. Maybe so. But if one was to take a poll, nobody would really want higher water rates either.

And hardly anybody would knowingly pay bigger water fees just to derail reining in public spending. They elected the provincial government to cut taxes, not to watch affected bureaucrats and politicians artfully dodge the axe. Others on the police board, and Chief Peter Campbell, can see the storm clouds on the horizon with Mr. Quinn's initiative. Good for them.

Mr. Quinn, unfortunately, comes across as just another politician scrambling for cover, protecting his turf. Instead he should face, and live with, the same hard choices so many others are facing.

— Rob Kelly

CHRÉTIEN CLAIMS TO MEET AND TALK WITH HOMELESS PERSON



Pages of the Past

One Year Ago

From the October 25, 1995 issue

- A proposal to close Allendale's Martin House was being considered by Halton's health and social services committee. Martin House was the oldest wing at the Milton home for the aged, and was not renovated when the facility underwent a \$20-million facelift. The proposal suggested moving Martin House's 100 beds to facilities in south Halton.

- Pepper spray was a hot issue at a meeting of the Halton Region Conservation Authority (HRCA). HRCA park officers had asked to be armed with the spray, many stating that disruptive park visitors placed their safety in jeopardy. At the meeting, some members felt it necessary to protect the officers while others felt that enforcement didn't fall under the HRCA mandate.

- "The Faces We Don't See", a report on poverty in Halton, was presented to the region's health and social services committee. The report identified single mothers as the most likely to be affected by poverty. At the conclusion of the presentation, the committee gave their support to a new anti-poverty coalition.

20 Years Ago

From the October 27, 1976 issue

- A possible solution to the Armstrong Arena controversy was set before Milton council. Officials with the town's post office showed considerable interest in erecting a new post office building on the site of the old arena. The old post office building at Main and Martin streets would then be taken over by the town as an extension to their municipal buildings. Council had been looking to sell Armstrong Arena after the rickety, old rink failed to meet provincial wind and snow load standards.

- Milton Mayor Anne MacArthur criticized Halton regional council for labelling the Milton Site F (at the corner of Tremaine and Britannia roads) as the only site seriously considered for a new regional landfill. Mrs. MacArthur deemed the decision "an atrocity" because it was made during a meeting she could not attend. "They knew the mayor of Milton wasn't going to be here," she criticized. "I think it is a poor thing that has been done."

50 Years Ago

From the October 24, 1946 issue

- Four Lowville youths were injured when a truck and car collided near Breslau. Originally heading to the international plowing match in Goderich, the four boys were rushed to Guelph General Hospital with cuts and burns. The other driver was not seriously injured.

- The Milton juvenile baseball team came up just short of winning the provincial title, losing in the third and deciding game to Simcoe. Milton was trounced 19-1 in the championship game, played in Waterloo.

Pud

by Steve Nease

